

DO Therapy | What I Wasn't Shown

From What I Experienced to What I Want to Create

We learn a great deal about ourselves, relationships, emotions, and life by observing the people and environments around us. Some lessons are taught directly. Others come from watching how people behave, respond to challenges, express themselves, and interact with one another.

But what about the things we weren't shown?

Perhaps you didn't see adults express affection, apologize, navigate disagreement, ask for help, celebrate accomplishments, or talk openly about emotions. You may have developed your own ways of managing these situations without having examples to learn from.

The objective isn't to blame the past or reject what you learned. It's to recognize what influenced you, appreciate what worked, and identify what you would like to experience and practice differently.

NOTICE | What Was Modeled? What Was Missing?

Think about the people, relationships, and environments that influenced you growing up.

- What behaviors, attitudes, and ways of interacting were commonly demonstrated?
- How did people express affection, appreciation, encouragement, or support?
- What happened when someone was upset, disappointed, frustrated, or made a mistake?
- How were disagreements handled? What happened afterward?
- What experiences or behaviors do you wish you had seen or experienced more often?
- What positive examples from your upbringing would you like to carry forward?

Consider: Something doesn't have to have been harmful to have left you underprepared. Sometimes we simply didn't have the opportunity to learn something.

REVIEW THE GAME TAPE | How Does It Show Up Today?

Consider how your earlier experiences may influence the way you respond to situations today.

- What comes naturally because you saw it modeled or practiced it growing up?
- What feels unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or difficult because you had limited experience with it?
- Are there situations where you know what you would like to do but aren't sure how?
- What do you tend to do instead? For example, withdraw, remain silent, problem-solve, avoid, overexplain, or wait for someone else to initiate.
- Are there behaviors you once assumed were normal or universal that you now recognize were specific to your family or environment?
- Where have you already developed ways of showing up that differ from what you experienced growing up?

Look for the distinction: Is this a response you learned, a skill you haven't developed, or an experience that still feels unfamiliar?

PRACTICE | Find a New Model

Choose one behavior, experience, or way of showing up that you would like to develop.

Examples might include:

- Expressing affection or appreciation.
- Asking for help or accepting support.
- Having a disagreement without withdrawing or escalating.
- Sharing emotions or expressing a personal need.
- Apologizing and repairing after a difficult interaction.
- Celebrating accomplishments or acknowledging your own efforts.
- Being playful, spontaneous, or emotionally available.

Now consider:

- What would this behavior look or sound like in everyday life?
- Who demonstrates this capability in a way you admire or respect?
- What could you learn by observing how they approach it?
- What is one small, realistic opportunity to try something similar?
- What might make the experience feel unfamiliar, and how could you support yourself while trying it?

Try This: Rather than attempting to change everything, select one specific behavior. Observe it, rehearse it if helpful, and experiment with it in a situation where you feel reasonably safe.

BUILD REPS | Create New Experiences

Learning something unfamiliar often requires more than understanding it. We need opportunities to experience it, practice it, and discover what works for us.

Over the coming week:

- Look for opportunities to practice your selected behavior.
- Notice what happens internally before, during, and afterward.
- Pay attention to what felt natural, unfamiliar, encouraging, or uncomfortable.
- Consider what you learned from the experience rather than judging whether you did it perfectly.
- Identify one adjustment you would make the next time.

Reflect:

- What did I try?
- What did I learn about myself?
- What happened?
- What would I like to practice again?

TEST & LEARN

Your family of origin helped shape your starting point, but it doesn't have to determine your entire playbook.

You can appreciate what you were given, recognize what was missing, and intentionally create new experiences.

You don't have to have been shown something growing up to learn how to do it today.